



Parallel session E1

Urban Politics and Revolution

Monday 11 November, 14.00 – 15.30

Haldane Room

Chair / discussant: **Prof. Camillo Boano**, Professor of Urban Design and Critical Theory, UCL

Decolonising space through appropriation of urban transformation

Dr Ronnen Ben-Arie, Adjunct Lecturer, Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion
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Downtown Haifa, which used to be the beating heart of the major Palestinian city up until the 1948 war and the establishment of the state of Israel, has been undergoing a substantial urban regeneration project in recent years. What might be considered as a typical case of neoliberal urban renewal – characterised by rehabilitation, rebranding, public-private partnerships and processes of class-based displacement and gentrification – is in fact the intersection of ongoing colonial conflict, contesting historical narratives and forces of development and destruction, the origins of which can be traced back to the settler-colonial past (and present) of the city. The years-long destruction and negligence of the urban space were first realised by the newly established state during the war and its aftermath, and then continued through municipal policies and planning regulations. Today's neoliberal urban regeneration project can be understood as the continuation by other means of dispossession and the elimination of both the physical and the symbolic space of the city's Palestinian past.

However, the current urban transformation is challenged and convoluted by a competing urban process, as young Palestinians, political and cultural activists appropriate the regeneration process in order to deviate it and re-produce the urban space, which the Palestinian society has lacked for many decades, thus resisting the city's settler-colonial logic of space. Through the formation of cultural and social spaces and the politisation of public space, the urban space becomes the foundation for the re-creation of a Palestinian urban subjectivity and collective identity.

The paper's aim is twofold. First, to critically examine the interrelations between the two processes at work and analyse how both the planned and the unplanned, the intended and the unexpected, take part in the production of urban space. Second, to explore the new possibilities this dual process opens for urban transformation and the decolonisation of space.

Tunis as Revolutionary City

Dena Qaddumi, PhD candidate (Architecture), Centre for Urban Conflicts Research, University of Cambridge

Tunisia is often touted as the only successful case to emerge from the Arab Spring. This is predicated on evaluating revolution through a lens of formal politics whereby democratic transition and stability take centre-stage. By contrast, I foreground the city of Tunis as the object through which to understand the process of revolution. This methodology emerged from a historical and regional analysis which associates the Arab Spring and the Arab city. The revolutionary city as an ‘ideal type’ has yet to be explicated in urban literature, though case studies have been undertaken. Paris is considered the infamous revolutionary city through time; the Russian Revolution developed a distinct urban programme embodied in ‘social condensers’; and for postcolonial states such as Mexico, revolution was an opportunity to question cultural identity and the built environment. Using politics and culture as analytical devices through which to associate revolution and the city, this research examines the revolutionary city of Tunis by tracing urban practices in specific sites of conflict such as avenues, the old city and the capitol complex.

Though the built form of the city emerges through long periods of time, it is possible to discern an urban plurality in Tunis, wherein different political and cultural claims are articulated and recognised in and through urban space. Such conclusions from Tunis indicate not only the possible trajectories of other Arab cities that may take a revolutionary route, but 21st-century revolutionary cities at large. Tunis, despite, or rather because of its ‘peripheral’ status, may herald a new paradigm in this regard; its trajectory has the potential to influence emancipation and revolution in the region and beyond. This research thus aims to move beyond pathological and orientalist understandings of the Arab city by demonstrating the general characteristics of cities undergoing political and cultural change.

Gaza: space, violence and everyday non-life

Prof. Haim Yacobi, Professor of Development Planning, UCL

“...حياة من قلة الموت...”

“...hayat min qillit al mawt...”

The above opening citation in Arabic is taken from an interview with a Gazan woman. It states that “life is going the opposite direction with me... no words can describe my life... it's life because death has not arrived yet...” (Massalha, 2018). Such liminal conditions, between life and death, are at the core of our empirical and theoretical reflections in this paper, which will present our ongoing research focusing on violence and health in Gaza. We argue that there is a necessity to expand the notion of everyday life in cities into what we will conceptualise as everyday non-life, namely the ‘not yet arrived’ death as a central reality (lived experience) that dictates the daily lives of Gazan people, resulting in the “economy of life and death embedded in (the) Israeli biopolitical and necropolitical regimes of control” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015). We suggest that the spatio-politics of everyday non-life goes beyond necropolitics (Mbembé, 2003); it is not simply about the use of social and political power, and the “right to kill” (Foucault, 1977) that dictates how some people may live and

how some must die. It is also about the spatial dimension encompassing non-life – the intentional production of a controlled space, as well as the destruction of it. In our concluding reflections, we argue that the conditions in Gaza are not the result of any natural disaster, neither the outcome of the last few months' events along Gaza's external land perimeter. Rather, we suggest the Gaza condition should be seen within the context of settler colonial political history, ideology and geography, which prioritise territorial and demographic control over basic rights, "the will of erasure", or at the very least the "systematic containment" (Wolfe, 2006; Veracini, 2010) of Gaza inhabitants.